

# INTRODUCING THE 27 CHALLENGES MANAGERS FACE

*Excerpt from “The 27 Challenges Managers Face: Step-by-Step Solutions to (Nearly) All of Your Management Problems” (September 2014)*

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*You walk into your weekly team meeting expecting the standard updates around the table. Some people more prepared than others. Not enough information from some, too much from others. Digressions. Side conversations. Devices. One hour turns into two. You sometimes think: “Why do we even have these team meetings?” After all, everyone touches base with everybody on the team almost daily. There is an open door policy. If something comes up, you let each other know as needed. You talk and e-mail with each other all day long.*

*Nonetheless, the meeting begins as usual. Until it quickly surfaces that very important Project Q is off track and behind schedule. How could this be? You’ve been checking in with everybody regularly one-on-one on top of the weekly team meeting.*

*It’s not clear what happened. Maybe there was a change in specifications that wasn’t fully communicated. Perhaps a resource constraint got in the way, a technology glitch, or human error? Somebody must have dropped the ball—internally or externally. Is there anyone who can be held accountable? Mr. Red has dropped the ball before.*

*There are many moving parts with Project Q. Now changes must be made throughout, changes that will require rework by counterparts in another group in another department. They will not be happy.*

*Time, resources, energy, and money have been wasted. There is blaming, complaining, explaining. Everything has been harder since the team recently lost its most valuable player, Ms. Platinum. And her replacement, Ms. Bronze, is still not fully up to speed. You spring into action and the firefighting ensues. You have a series of one-on-one huddles with the team members you know you can count on in a jam. You take over some responsibilities yourself—including begging the counterparts in the other group in the other department to redo their part. There are some quick stand-up meetings and long hours of heavy lifting. The crisis is handled, and Project Q is back on track.*

*When you figure out exactly what happened, there probably will be some very difficult conversations, and there will be consequences. Some people might lose their jobs. Even if Mr. Red is not to blame, it’s about time you really spoke to him about his stubbornly inconsistent performance.*

*Once you finally get everything back on track, you are way behind on your other responsibilities. So are your employees. But things are mostly back to normal. .*

*You touch base with everybody almost daily. They know your door is always open. If something comes up, you let each other know as needed. You talk and e-mail with each other all day long. In any event, you will catch up with everyone in the next team meeting.*

The manager of Project Q above appears to be attending reasonably well to the fundamentals of Management 101: holding regular team meetings, touching base with his employees almost daily, open door, and ongoing visibility by e-mail and telephone. And if you asked him just before Project Q fell apart, he probably would have said, “Everything is going just fine.”

The manager in this story is like the vast majority of managers at all levels in organizations of all shapes and sizes. Like so many managers, this manager’s communication is mostly ad hoc, hit or miss, surface level, and often pro forma, “managing” more or less on autopilot until something goes wrong—which it always does—and then they get pulled into firefighting mode.

What can a real manager in the real world actually do to gain control? That is exactly the question that I seek to answer on every page of my new book, “The 27 Challenges Managers Face”

Over the last 20 years, my firm RainmakerThinking has asked hundreds of thousands of managers in organizations of all shapes and sizes, *“What are the most difficult challenges you face when it comes to managing people?”*

Regardless of industry or job title, managers cite the same core issues: More than 90 percent of responses over the years refer to the same 27 challenges. The same cases come up over and over again. The most frequent and regularly recurring challenges fall into seven basic categories:

1. Leadership transitions
2. Employee self-management; work habits
3. Performance management
4. Employee attitudes
5. Managing superstar employees
6. Managing despite factors beyond your control
7. The need for a fresh start to an old relationship; renewal

It turns out that when things are going wrong in a management relationship, almost always, the common denominator is unstructured, low-substance, hit-or-miss communication. More to the point, we have been tracking and documenting and synthesizing the best step-by-step solutions to these challenges used by the very best managers. The book takes apart in detail every one of the most frequent and regularly occurring challenges managers face—even the most awkward and difficult—and shows exactly how the best managers tailor conversations with their employees to systematically improve these situations.

So what do the best managers do differently? The best managers build and maintain an ongoing schedule of high-quality one-on-one dialogues with every single person they manage. High-quality means highly structured and highly substantive: ongoing, regular, scheduled, frequent, with a clear execution focus, and specific to the individual. These are not so-called “crucial conversations” when things go wrong, but regular check-ins every step of the way to concentrate on the fundamentals:

- Making expectations clear
- Tracking performance and provide ongoing candid feedback
- Providing support, direction, troubleshooting, and guidance
- Recognizing and rewarding in line with performance

As a result, they spend less and less time firefighting. They get ahead of the problems and prevent the fires. What is more, they almost always increase employee performance and morale, increase retention of high performers and turnover among low performers, and achieve significant measurable improvements in business-outcomes.

Beginning in January 2015, I will focus on a different challenge from the book each month in an online article on [www.trainingmag.com](http://www.trainingmag.com).

*Excerpt from “The 27 Challenges Managers Face: Step-by-Step Solutions to (Nearly) All of Your Management Problems” released by Jossey-Bass, the Wiley imprint in San Francisco (September 2014; \$23.95). For more information, visit <http://rainmakerthinking.com/books-videos/27-challenges-managers-face-step-step-solutions-nearly-management-problems/>*

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